

Self-assessment of the digital skills of career education specialists during the provision of remote services

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Abstract

The drastic and structural changes in the labour market and organisational environment is related not only to the COVID-19 pandemic and rapid technological development but also to general globalisation trends, demographic situations, deterioration, and dynamic changes at all levels of education, which emphasise the need for quality career education and guidance in secondary schools. This study aims to explore the digital self-assessment of career guidance professionals and also, to determine carrier guidance professionals' attitude towards digital literacy. Data was analysed using percentages for qualitative data and content analysis for qualitative research. From the results of the research, most of the career guidance specialists have been able to use digital technologies to communicate with students, parents, colleagues, and most of them currently use digital technologies in their work.

Keywords: career; career education; digital competence; digital literacy; digital tools; guidance;

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1. Introduction

Although the Covid-19 pandemic dramatically affected the education and career guidance environment and daily life, the drastic and structural changes within the labor market and organisational environment has been connected with general globalisation trends; demographic situation deterioration; changes in all areas of education as well as the societal and economical changes of the past century. During the pandemic, digital technologies have inevitably been adopted in the fields of education and counseling so that counselors had to either partially or fully switch to remote career services. Although many career services have already used a variety of digital services solutions, the rapid transition to a partial or full remote service has been a huge challenge for many counselors. In 2013, the European Union's Program for Employment and Social Solidarity published the manual "*New technologies for Career guidance and mobility*" (Iannis & Pinzi, 2013), to help describe the actuality of digital tools and technologies in the Career guidance area.

However, in the new reality of faced challenges, career guidance practitioners need not only use practical digital solutions- various educational sites, creation and storage of Europass CVs, advertisement portals – but also engage in the transfer of all career guidance activities within a virtual environment – educational classes, lectures, seminars, consultations, testing, excursions, etc. It is important to note that during this period, not only did various technological solutions for remote work become a center-stage but also the digital competencies and abilities of counsellors rapidly transpired into relevant and important components. At the present moment, there is a growing opinion that guidance counsellor education must change to provide new digital knowledge and skills for future guidance counsellors (Parkkonen & Pukkila, 2018). Also, career practitioners have realised that they have to acquire the different digital skills needed to facilitate individual and group career counselling online (Maree, 2021).

The manual of Research Centre (JRC) and the European Commission's science and knowledge service "The Digital Competence Framework for Citizen" (2017), also known as DigComp, have all become a reference point for the development and strategic planning of digital competence initiatives both at European and Member State levels. The document focuses on an eight-level description as well as provides pertinent examples of the use for these levels (Carretero Gomez, Vuorikari, & Punie, 2017). On its part, the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (*DigCompEdu*, 2017) provides a framework that sets out to describe the facets of digital competence for educators by helping them to comprehensively assess and develop their digital competencies; identify their training needs, and offer targeted training (Redecker, 2017). Additionally, this document embraces the notion of diversity as a way of stimulating debate on the ever-changing demands on educators' digital competence levels.

Career education and guidance events in Latvian schools are organised in a good number of ways. However, in the period beyond 2016, there has been a huge contribution made by the European Social Fund project "Career Support in General and Vocational Education Institutions". The programme implements various comprehensive career activities to promote the development of students' understanding of their abilities, skills, and assessments, as well as to help them set and manage career goals. It also promotes knowledge and understanding of the world of work and thus, ensuring continuous development of overall career skills, successful choice of further education, and successful entry into the labour market. The continuous development and use of career guidance professionals have led to an increased focus on career exploration and development (Lucas et al., 2021). Advances in communication and technology continue to help with the increment of professionals who offer career guidance to students. As the Covid-19 pandemic began, there were no longer in-person sessions for career guidance; hence the career guidance professionals had to come up with remote ways to effectively carry on with their career guidance activities virtually through engaging in lectures, educational classes, and even excursions using online platforms.

1.1. Related research

1.1.1. Web-Based Career Guidance: Possibilities and Challenges

A good number of digital tools have been used in career counseling long before the actuality of remote counseling. As early as 2003, the topicality and novelty of web-based digital portfolios, as a powerful new tool in online space, was successfully described (Barnes, Clark, Thull, 2003). The authors' emphasised that the use of the Internet in the portfolio development process increased the ability of counseling candidates to effectively construct and use their portfolio, sort, create and edit different elements within these e-portfolios. Since then, like other educational services, various e-services, different e-tools in career guidance have been evolved very fundamentally. The role of ICT (information and communication technology) has increased at all levels not only in education but also in career guidance services (Kettunen, 2017). As such, the pedagogical approach and methods as well as the different set of digital solutions in mere guidance and guidance counseling continue to be updated and used to meet newer and rapid changes of customer needs and expectations.

Also, there has been an imminent level of development of social media that is now perceived as a useful habit that can be adopted to conduct different reasons like in the case of business and career development purposes. In essence, many studies have been conducted on the topicality of digitization of guidance area. In a career guidance context, James Watts (Watts, 2002) identified three overarching trends in using digital tools in guidance: increased accessibility, interactivity, and diffusion of ICT-based resources. Jacobus Maree described that e-counseling is regarded as either being synchronous (real-time, face time, or audio) or asynchronous (using email or messaging to ask questions, receiving email responses, reflecting using the written word) in nature. He further noted that e-counseling could be adopted in-person, online, blended, or hybrid career counseling activities. (Maree, 2021). Sampson and Osborn (Sampson, Osborn, 2014) emphasise that online tools, interactive processes, and e-communication create newer insights and opinions about an individual's career and turns the locus from expert content to a blend of expert- and user-constructed knowledge. To say the least, a wider range of practical guides and checklists for using ICT in career services have been successfully described in different areas as follows (e.g. Osborn et al., 2011); different ICT tools and applications in career service practice (e.g. Hooley et al, 2010, Osborn et al, 2011), the expanding role of ICT and social media in career services to professional standards, as well as facilitating communication in e-guidance (Bimrose et al, 2010).

There are many other possibilities illustrated in various articles- using ICT not just as a tool, but also as a powerful agent of change with different transversal elements of education, business, employment (ELGPN, 2010). Sampson (2008) emphasises that digital-based ICT and applications help young people and adults make informed career decisions, considering that there are many available options. Sampson et al (2008) further described many digital-based options and possibilities that extended to e-based self-assessment, online career tests, decision aids, distant-learning materials, CV writing programs as well as matching systems relating the user's input to work or learning opportunities (Vourinen, Sampson, Kettunen, 2011). The use of technology continues to be an alternative component to face-to-face career guidance, and thus, career guidance professionals use technology in gathering career information, conducting career interventions and assessments amongst many more others (Sailer et al., 2021). There are various ways in which career guidance professionals use technology to ensure that they deliver career guidance services to their clients. For instance, the professionals have successfully utilised and taken advantage of the benefits of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in offering their services. They can also now deliver their services digitally by conducting online conference sessions for career guidance, using mobile applications, online chatrooms, and social media, different digital or video communication, interaction, and collaboration platforms- for example, Google hangouts, Cahoot collaborate, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc (Sailer et al., 2021).

Researches underline some of the challenges that increase with the guidance process in digital space which include; ethical questions, systematically integrating websites to existing services, appropriate guiding mechanisms related to the evolution of internet-based career resources and services, as well as support and training of counselors (Vourinen, Sampson, Kettunen, 2011). Another group of researchers also report that counseling, as a career and the needs of young people, has been changed during the Covid-19 pandemic. They now experience health, socioeconomic situation problems, big anxiety and stress levels, low motivational levels, and sense of purpose (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). In this regard, it means that there is a need for innovative and contextualised career counselling that would help enhance their employability; and bolster their narratability, narrativity, and autobiographic levels (Maree, 2021). Maree (2021) indicates that the role of policymakers should be to develop policy strategies to facilitate e-career counseling and promote dialogue between stakeholders like professional bodies, education departments, and researchers on the future of e-counseling in general and e-career counseling in particular. Professionals' perspective on this is that there is a positive and negative outcome from the use of digital tools in the provision of career skills development.

The benefits of using digital tools now include an expanded reach of services. Another point to note is that the use of Information Communication and Technology in career development could also be helpful because it can help reach a large number of individuals (Van Laar et al., 2017). Technology has enabled professionals to reach their clients even when they are not at the office, which increases the number of people they can guide and help in skill development at any given moment in time. Through online counseling, university students have been shown to improve their skills since they do not need to book any form of physical appointment. In addition to this, online training continues to take place at any time of the day. The other advantage of digital tools in the provision of career skills development is that there is an immediate response and direct feedback. Technology has enabled the professionals to offer prompt and around-the-clock services; and by doing so, the students and clients can enjoy continuous career planning and assists in preventing mistakes whenever they arise and when it comes to the skills they require to fit in a certain career (Van Laar et al., 2017). Professionals indeed acknowledge that the use of digital tools in career skills development gives them a chance to maximize their career Counsellor Service (Lucas et al., 2021). This is because online assessments help both the clients and the counselor to get a better understanding of themselves.

Notably, assessment tools have been adopted to assist individuals in thinking and deciding on career choices. Despite these digital tools being beneficial, they have also played a huge role in limiting people's level of thinking and confidentiality. On the contrary, though, it has been shown that clients could lack or would have limited digital literacy or even lack the internet to access the tools. The view fronted by most career guidance practitioners on this issue is that these tools can help greatly in the development of skills despite the few challenges that may hinder the success of the entire procedure.

1.1.2. Digital Competencies in Career Guidance

There is a greater level of difference between digital literacy and digital competence. Digital competence is an individual's ability to apply the tenets of information and technology within a predetermined context. In contrast, digital literacy is one's ability to use and identify technology confidentiality, creativity and be at par with the challenges, demands, working, and learning in the society as a whole. At the moment, there are numerous methods forged to assess digital literacy for career guidance professionals. The technology self-assessment tool is one of the ways to determine digital literacy (Sailer et al., 2021). The tool assists the professionals in collecting data on how they use technology, access their facility with infrastructure and hardware basic skills, as well as help in evaluating their access to professional technology development. Another evaluation criterion is the use of the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment, which defines the significant skills required to use the

internet and computer, to evaluate whether a user can utilise and perform computer tasks (Van Laar et al., 2017). In consequence, the professionals can also use the Digital Literacy Assessment. This assessment tool is actionable and diagnostic. Researchers indicate that the guidance counsellor education must change to provide new knowledge and skills for future guidance counsellors (Parkkonen, Pukkila, 2018).

Of particular importance to note, the expanding role of ICT and social media in career services to professional standards, which describe the requisite skills and competencies, has been well emphasised (Barnes & Watts, 2009; Barnes, et al., 2010; Pyle, 2000). Researches have further indicated that successful integration of technology, digital tools, and social media in career services is dependent not only on the available skills or technical facilities of a user but also on practitioners' willingness to accept the changes that new technologies could bring (Kettunen, 2017). The skills and competencies of career practitioners that use existing and emerging technologies in career services have been described and examined in various researches (Barnes et al, 2010, Pyle, 2000).

Ability to diagnose client needs, motivate them, help them to process data, assist them in creating digital portfolios and career plans, knowledge of computer-assisted software, different websites, constructive e-learning, and e-communication in the career service context are recognized as main skills of career guidance practitioners (Pyle, 2000). This division of skills also coincides with the classification of Bimrose et al (2010); who divided the main skills and competencies of web-based career guidance into two separate but interrelated sectors. Firstly, he relates these skills and competencies to career professionals as ICT users and emphasises different ICT users' skills; places much emphasis on the awareness of technological development, technical skills, and ability to search information. Secondly, the researcher fronts a general career guidance skill and competence basis that uses different career tests and questionnaires, counselling skills, active listening skills, coaching skills, etc. Barnes and Watts (Barnes, Watts, 2009) also emphasise a set of competencies that relate to using ICT in the guidance process for purposes of addressing clients' needs for information, experiential learning, constructivist learning, and communication.

Interesting to note, the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (*DigCompEdu*) manual successfully illustrates these educator-specific digital competencies by way of proposing a 22-elementary competencies framework that is organized in 6 areas; Professional Engagement, Digital Resources, Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Empowering Learners and Facilitating Learners Digital Competence (Redecker, 2017). For this reason, the research conducted in Finland divided four categories of career practitioners regarding using social media - an ability to use social media for delivering information; ability to use social media for delivering personal career guidance; ability to utilise social media for collaborative career exploration; ability to utilise social media for co-careering (Kettunen, Sampson, Vuorinen, 2015).

Moore and Czerwinska (2019) noted that despite practitioners now using a wide range of digital devices and applications there is still a tendency for older workers being less confident compared to their younger counterparts. The study also revealed that career practitioners were more likely to receive training in two main areas - different applications (e.g., software for creating content, social media, webinars, and communication technologies, surveys designing, use of online polling, etc); and professional practice (the implications and ethical use of digital technology, digital pedagogy, personal identity protection, etc) (Moore, Czerwinska, 2019). Kettunen (2017) identified five general approaches -passive, information-centered, communication-centered, collaborative career exploration, and co-careering approach using social media- which posits career practitioners' conceptions of social media and also the competency of social media in career services.

1.2. Purpose of the study

The situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic did not only create the need to remotely organise the learning process but also transfer all career guidance activities – educational classes, lectures, seminars, consultations, testing, excursions, etc. – to a virtual environment. As career guidance professionals worked with students, primarily in person, before the pandemic, the issue of the digital skills of career guidance specialists became topical in ensuring continuous career guidance. Not all career professionals were able to reorient their work remotely. In e-learning education circumstances, career guidance professionals focus on assessing and developing their digital skills and literacy; establish and compile the necessary materials and different e-tools and still, aim to become creators of digital content themselves. This paper aims to explore how career guidance professionals carry out their digital self-assessment, evaluate their digital literacy, and also fronts a clear understanding of digital competence, career guidance, and the digital tools used in career guidance. To do this, the study sets out to analyse the data gathered from qualitative research on the use of virtual instruments in enhancing remote operations by different career guidance professionals. The study aims to explore the digital self-assessment of career guidance professionals and also, seeks to determine:

- How do career guidance professionals use digital technology to deliver career guidance services?
- How do professionals perceive the potentiality of digital tools to provide career skills development?
- How do career guidance professionals evaluate their digital literacy levels?

2. Methods and Materials

For this study, mixed methods research was used since it helps attain a complete and synergistic utilisation of research data.

2.1. Data collection tools

The authors gathered and analysed both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data information from several sources including a survey of 65 career guidance practitioners (career counselors, educators-career counselors, teachers) and online expert as well as interviews with 5 career guidance leading professionals from Latvia.

2.2. Data collection procedure

The Survey was based on Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (*DigCompEdu*), which describe the facets of digital competence for educators that include: professional engagement, orientation in digital resources, using digital tools in guidance, counselling, testing, encouraging, digital competence and responsibility, most common challenges in the guidance process.

In the interview, career specialists were asked about their experience with various digital tools in the course of providing counselling and career education; their adaptation to remote counselling; the benefits and challenges in providing such services, as well as examples of good practice in their work. The data were collected in March 2021.

2.3. Analysis

The analysis of this research's collected data was through content analysis for qualitative data, and percentages for quantitative data.

3. Findings

Only one man completed the survey, which reflects a typical situation in Latvia's guidance area, where most counselors and educators are women. The rest of the participants were females ranging from the age of 20 to 60, with a few who were above the age of 60. The majority of the females were careers educators while the rest were career counselors. Most of them had twenty-plus years of experience, with others ranging from ten years and above and a few of them with less than ten years of experience. Analyzing the self-assessment of digital skills of career specialists (Table No. 1), it can be seen that digital skills are assessed relatively high. The highest scores are in the area of Professional Engagement, which is defined as competence to use digital technologies to enhance organizational communication with learners, parents, and third parties, also to engage in collaboration with other educators (Carretero Gomez, Vuorikari, & Punie, 2017).

Noticeably, most of the other career guidance specialists have been able to use digital technologies to communicate with students, parents, colleagues, and many more. It can be noted that at least 77% of the specialists use digital tools to organise the consultation process. Of course, a higher assessment of digital skills is also influenced by the fact that during the Covid-19 pandemic, education and guidance professionals have rapidly learned and developed their knowledge at a rapid pace. They have further forged and abide by professional responsibilities including constant communication processes with remotely-based clients.

In one of the interviews, a career counselor mentioned that "a particularly rapid leap in the acquisition of digital skills took place in 2020 when the latest platforms, applications, communication, and presentation tools had to be mastered immediately". Another respondent in the interview also described this period as a time that experienced rapid growth as well as extreme stress. But at the same time, it was a challenge. " Professionals ' comments indicated that they would not be able to work with their clients without these skills also agree with some researchers' suggestion that the use of digital tools in career skills development gives professionals a chance to maximize their career Counselor Service (Lucas et al., 2021).

Further to this, career specialists noted that "communication with students and parents is of great importance in the digital environment at the moment." We pay special attention to support for 9th-grade students who are invited to attend individual career counseling". Slightly fewer professionals used digital tools to organise counseling as well as share experiences with colleagues. More critically, professionals also evaluated their ability to use different technologies. Only 36.9% of respondents indicated that they could successfully evaluate the reliability of various digital resources; 40% could use various counseling techniques in the digital environment and, 58.4% could only do it at specific times of the practice.

These results indicate that some professionals do not feel fully confident in their ability to evaluate digital tools and use them to the chosen goal. In evaluating the use of digital tools (Table 2) collaboration boards- Jamboard.com, Paddlet. co etc), at least 35% of the participants indicated frequent use of question and quiz platforms (menti.com, slido.com); 33.8% used frequent and feedback tools (slido.com, Kahoot .com); and 32.3% used them more often. In assessing the open survey, the most frequently used tools include various platforms used in educational institutions - Zoom.com, MSTeams.com, as well as interactive platforms with a wide variety of options. The most popular platforms were noted to be Menti.com, Kahoot.com, and Paddlet.com. As well, career counselors also indicated various information resources and tests about career and growth opportunities – Niid.lv, Uzdevumi.lv etc. A career counselor C mentioned that the main goals were to communicate in a way that is acceptable to students – "The challenge is to address students in a way that is acceptable and familiar to them, not in a way that is more convenient for me. So, I used to use,

for example, the Whatsapp communication channel". Respondents were also only asked about the factors that determine the choice of digital tools - the most frequently mentioned factors were the possibility to use the free tool (~ 98.5%); the convenience of the tool (94.5%), and ease of registration (78.5%).

The visual design did not play such a role (33% marked these factors as important). Table no. 2 can be seen, however, those career professionals rarely use digital tool options such as Video question options (~ 77% not use), Storytelling platforms (64.62% not use), Blogs, and video blogs (58.46%), which may also indicate that many digital opportunities are not known to counselors or do not suit their needs. Indirectly, this is confirmed by consultant B who noted: "Initially, I tried many new digital things, but now I have stuck to a few resources that I find more convenient and familiar. Yes, I sometimes try something else, but I still feel better with the tools I have already used successfully." The survey shows that consultants in the digital environment are most free to manage the use of various information resources in their consultations (almost 70% note that they are used frequently), which can be explained by the fact that even before the Covid-19 pandemic, specialists actively recommended various digital resources and web pages- 33% of specialists often use various online tests and other self-assessment methods in consultations, while only 21.5% encourage clients to create digital portfolios and summaries of achievements, while 35% of them never do so.

An opinion of interviewed specialists regarding the use of online career tests remained divided - consultant B notes that "I often use various online tests with my clients, I think that is enough. I miss other interactive, digitized tools, such as associative and metaphorical cards." On the other hand, there is a different opinion by consultant C, who notes that "I do not use online tests, I have a much more important conversation with a client, nor have I found many such cool and interesting tests for students to use".

Concerning digital skills, the Empowering section, which the European Framework for Digital Competence for Educators (2017) explains as the ability to ensure accessibility to digital resources and activities, to use technologies to address clients' diverse learning needs, plays a very important role. In addition to the interviewee's statement about the importance of the client, 100% of respondents agree that the most important thing is not the technology, but the client. 86% of them encourage clients to work with technologies at their rhythm as 78% often or always make sure that customers have access to appropriate technologies and encourage students to work together in a digital environment.

Table 1. : Self-assessment of digital skills of career specialists

Area of Digital Competence	Always, often		Sometimes		Very rarely, Never	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional Engagement						
<i>I use digital technologies</i>						
to communicate with parents, students about various organizational issues	62	95.38	3	4.62	0	0
to communicate with your colleagues and management	59	90.77	5	7.69	1	1.54
to organize counseling for students and parents	50	76.92	14	21.54	1	1.54
to learn and share experiences	44	67.69	21	32.31	0	0.00
Digital Resources						
<i>I can</i>						
use various digital technology tools depending on the context and purpose of the communication	27	41.54	38	58.46	0	0.00
select the most appropriate digital resources for counseling and teaching	30	46.15	35	53.85	0	0.00

evaluate the reliability of various digital resources	24	36.92	41	63.08	0	0.00
use various counseling techniques in the digital environment	26	40.00	38	58.46	1	1.54
Teaching and Guidance				0.00		
<i>In digital counselling I use</i>				0.00		0.00
self-assessment tests	21	32.31	35	53.85	9	13.85
another self-assessment methods	22	33.85	35	53.85	15	23.08
digital portfolio of client accomplishments	14	21.54	28	43.08	23	35.38
a variety of resources for career choice and development	45	69.23	12	18.46	3	4.62
Empowering						
I make sure that my clients have appropriate technology	51	78.46	11	16.92	3	4.62
I allow clients to work with technologies at their own rhythm	56	86.15	6	9.23	3	4.62
the most important thing is not the technology, but the client	65	100.00				
I encourage students to work together in digital space	51	78.46	10	15.38	4	6.15

Table 2: Use of different digital tools in guidance

Tools	Always, often		Sometimes		Rarely, never	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Collaboration tools	23	35.38	16	24.62	26	40
Questionnaire and quiz tools	22	33.85	19	29.23	24	36.92
Storytelling platforms	5	7.69	18	27.69	42	64.62
Tools to provide and receive feedback	21	32.31	21	32.31	23	35.38
Video question options	5	7.69	10	15.38	50	76.92
Blogs, Videoblogs	12	18.46	15	23.08	38	58.46

4. Discussion

It is evident that during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the career guidance professionals were able to carry on with their work, remotely. The educators also had a high digital literacy and skills in availing resources for career advancement and also in collecting necessary data to help in career guidance procedures. It is also evident that they did not have any problems with using digital tools to interact and communicate or even to carry out various tests. It is also evident that most of the educators were effective and efficient in the application and use of digital resources while just but a few lacked sufficient knowledges on digital resources. The survey shows that career professionals are willing to change to provide new knowledge and skills, which are already in discussions by leading career researchers (Parkkonenn, Pukkila, 2018).

Although career professionals generally value their skills very well, they still tend to use some of the most common resources and tools. However, they fail to use as many career counseling opportunities as possible. This could be attributed to the average age of counselors (Moore & Scerwinska, 2019). They affirm that there is a tendency for older workers to be less confident compared to their younger counterparts. The obtained results also actualise the Bimrose Classification (Bimrose et.al, 2010), which talks about the competencies of career specialists in 2 main sectors - general career guidance skills and competencies and general career guidance skills and competencies. In the interviews, specialist D said that *“a lot depends on a person personally - how he will want to learn, whether he wants to learn, and learn new things”*, which is a statement that echoes Kettunen (2017) findings; that successful integration of technology, digital tools and social media in career services are dependent not only on the available skills or technical facilities but also on practitioners'

willingness to accept and use new technologies (Kettunen, 2017). Consultant B interviewed points to an intensive learning process concerning digital technologies - *“I am learning more than ever in my life now - the courses and seminars are continuous and at times already accessible. But, of course, to acquire new skills, you have to learn intensively”*. Previously, researchers have indicated that careers practitioners revealed they would like to receive training in two main areas- different applications and professional practice (Moore, Czerwinska, 2019).

Interviewed career counselors were also asked about the advantages and disadvantages of remote counseling. The interviewees mentioned both the lack of personal contact and the fact that digital counseling requires much more energy, effort, and involvement. It was also mentioned as a disadvantage that it is more difficult to share experiences with colleagues, to form informal conversations. The open-ended question also mentioned as challenges that student do not always connect to cameras, internet problems, digital fatigue and connecting too many responsibilities, and increasing workloads.

On the other hand, participants affirmed the importance that comes about with time-saving in conducting the practice remotely. They mentioned the fact that counseling became more accessible to students - *“shy and closed children are now also applying”* and freer work organization. They also mentioned a safe environment, easier communication, student responsiveness as benefits that come with working remotely. It further helps increase the number of clients since technology enables professionals to reach their clients easier thereby raising the number of people they can guide and help in skill development at any given moment in time (Van Laar et al., 2017). However, several career specialists indicated that they did not see any advantages of this kind of arrangement and would, therefore, desire to return to the usual face-to-face environment sooner.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

In the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital technologies have inevitably been adopted in the fields of education and counselling so that counsellors had to either partially or fully switch to remote career services. As such, the capacity to easily transition to a partial or full remote service has proven to be a huge challenge for many counsellors in Latvia and the world over. Career practitioners have thereby come under the realisation that they have to acquire different digital skills that are certainly needed to facilitate individual and group career counselling online. It has been noted that the immediate use of technology continues to be an alternative component to face-to-face career guidance, and thus, career guidance professionals use technology in gathering career information, conducting career interventions and assessments amongst many more others.

The study has shown that most of the career guidance specialists have been able to use digital technologies to communicate with students, parents, colleagues, and many more with at least 77% of the specialists use digital tools to organise the consultation process. Although career professionals generally value their skills very well, they still tend to use some of the most common resources and tools. As a result of this, they tend to fail to use as many career counseling opportunities as possible, which has been largely attributed to the average age of counselors. It is therefore suggested that counselors and career guidance practitioners engage in exploring other pertinent digital tools that they can use to enhance the capacity to provide their services remotely.

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